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ABSTRACT

The evaluation of locally-funded bilingual education programs differs methodologically from that of federally-funded programs. In the latter, comparisons are made between the performance of limited English proficiency (LEP) students in bilingual programs with those LEP students not in the programs, to determine what the proficiency of the program participants would have been without the bilingual education. This is done to justify the use of federal funds for these programs, with the intention of eventual transfer of financial responsibility to the local level. The locally-funded programs must justify their existence to the community, and thus the questions that are asked in program evaluation are different from those asked at the federal level. Such questions include length of time students stay in the programs, "drop-out" rates, rate of graduation, English proficiency of the program participants, and attitudes of the community and educational personnel. These questions compare the LEP students in the program with those LEP students not in the program and with monolingual English students in the community at large. What is needed, then, is a good testing and record-keeping system for LEP students which is compatible with that for non-LEP students. (PJM)

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Evaluating Locally Funded Bilingual Education Programs - Problems and Solutions

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As many as 2.5 million children in the United States primarily speak, read, and write a language other than English. These children are educationally disadvantaged because they cannot understand instruction traditionally given in English. Bilingual education is designed to teach these children English language proficiency and subject matter in their native language so that they can progress through school in the regular, monolingual English program. Bilingual education theory does not exclude native language maintenance if a school district should decide to include it as a goal and to provide the funding from local resources for native language maintenance.

Funding of bilingual education at the school district level is varied. Rarely are local projects supported from just one source of funds. In addition to local and state funds, eighteen federal programs provide some financial support to bilingual education projects. Ninety percent of federal funds supporting bilingual education are provided through ESEA Title I (thirty-seven percent) and Title VII (fifty-three

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percent). The final financial burden for compensatory bilingual education programs falls on the local education agencies which supply at least seventy percent of the funds for the education of limited English proficiency (LEP) pupils. The Lau decision does not accept financial inability as an excuse for not offering necessary education to LEP pupils, especially if there are significant numbers of these students.

ESEA, Title VII funding of bilingual-bicultural education programs requires a quantitative pretest and posttest estimate of pupil growth in English and the home language . Federally funded programs also require a comparison of LEP pupils in the Title VII funded bilingual education program with LEP pupils not in the Title VII funded program. Such comparisons call for an evaluative-research design with treatment and control group comparison, preprogram or entry base-line and exit comparison groups of norm-referenced or criterion-referenced testing data. However, the very nature of bilingual education mitigates against rigorous experimental, control, and random assignment design since the Office of Civil Rights and the Lau remedies make it mandatory that all pupils in need of linguistic instruction in English receive it. Such a population is unique, culturally and linguistically, forcing instructional programs to be

loosely designed and measurement problems to be acute. It is possible to have a number of financial bases for bilingual education programs within a school district, that is, all federally funded, mixed federally and locally funded, and all locally funded. Since capacity building and institutionalization is the central concern of current Title VII funding of bilingual education programs, the goal of federal funding in bilingual education is to eventually have these programs become all locally funded programs. The continuing evaluation of locally funded programs should become as important as the evaluation of federally funded programs.

Guidelines for Evaluating Federally Funded Bilingual Education Programs

Since the chances are good that a locally funded bilingual education program in the schools will be the off-shoot of a previously federally funded program, the evaluation plan for that program should incorporate the basic guidelines (Federal Register, Vol. 45, No. 67, pp. 23216-23217) under Title VII. These guidelines state that the evaluation plan must be developed in conjunction with the scope and objectives of the project and should specifically provide that: 1) The overall evaluation plan is consistent with, and appropriate for, the instructional and training objectives of the project.

2) The evaluation design includes attention to: (a) assessing attainment of all objectives; (b) data collection instruments and methods; (c) data analysis procedures; (d) time schedules; and (e) staff responsibilities. 3) The evaluation design specifies a comparison procedure to estimate what the performance of participants would have been in the absence of the project. 4) The methods to be used to identify nonparticipants for comparison or to utilize another comparison standard (e.g., an historical or a statistical comparison) have been identified. 5) Sampling procedures have been identified, if applicable, and steps have been taken to insure that sample results will be representative of the entire project population. 6) Data collection and analysis procedures have been identified which will address evaluation questions and which are appropriate for use with the project data. 7) The data obtained will contribute to improvement in the operation of the project.

Although the federal guidelines state that a program evaluation is essential, the guidelines do not tell the evaluators what to do. The most important question is item 3, a comparison procedure to determine what the performance of participants would have been in the absence of the federally funded project. This question is to justify to Congress the use of federal funds for

the purpose of bilingual education. The balance of the items are procedural and are to be a part of any good evaluation plan.

Questions to be Probed in Evaluating Locally Funded Bilingual Education Programs

There are no guidelines for evaluating locally funded bilingual education programs. At first glance, the guidelines for federally funded bilingual education programs seem reasonable and appropriate, but in reality, these guidelines are impossible to carry out in locally funded bilingual education programs for two reasons: 1) the data is not available or relevant, and 2) local administrators and policy makers ask different questions from those posed by members of Congress.

Problems of data collection and procedures. Federal guidelines for conducting bilingual education programs are frequently impossible to apply to locally funded bilingual education programs for the following reasons:

1. Bilingual education programs were started hastily so that instructional and training objectives of the programs were never stated in writing or as measurable assessment objectives.

2. Data assessment instruments are not readily available to school personnel. At best, most programs will have only a few teacher-made tests, at worst, no

testing procedure is used at all. Promotion from level to level or in and out of the program is based solely on teacher judgements.

3. Time schedules and staff responsibilities in schools are generally not allocated for the purpose of conducting program evaluations.

4. Comparison groups within locally funded bilingual education programs are almost impossible to find since the Lau decision stipulates that all LEP pupils receive either bilingual education or English as a second language support. It is much easier to compare a federally funded bilingual education program with a locally funded bilingual education program than it is to compare a locally funded program with no program at all.

5. Base-line data is usually non-existent, unless a continuous testing procedure has been in effect for a number of years before the program evaluation started. Unfortunately, school districts, in attempting to find "good" tests will frequently change testing instruments.

6. Strict sampling procedures are difficult to adhere to, since LEP children are highly mobile and come in classroom lots. Classrooms of frequently changing children cannot be randomly selected.

7. Data collection and analysis require trained personnel and procedures usually not available to the average school district. Data collection procedures

are particularly suspect when the procedure is left to the classroom teacher.

8. Program improvement generally does not result from program evaluation since the implementation of the program change recommendations requires special abilities and funds for generating these changes. Once the momentum of a locally funded program is in progress, little can happen to stop or change this momentum.

These problems do not mean that the evaluation of locally funded bilingual education programs is impossible, it just means that the data, the data collection process, and the change strategies are different from those of federally funded programs.

Evaluation questions about locally funded bilingual education programs. School administrators and policy makers tend to ask evaluation questions which are different from those asked by Congress. Examples of these questions are the following:

1. How long do entering limited English proficiency students remain in the bilingual educational/ ESL program?

2. How does the secondary school "drop-out" rate of limited English proficiency students in bilingual educaiton/ESL programs compare with the "drop-out" rate of nonlimited English proficiency students in the

regular, monolingual English program.

3. How many secondary school limited English proficiency students in bilingual education/ESL programs graduate compared to nonlimited English proficiency students.

4. How does the academic achievement of limited English proficiency students in bilingual education/ESL programs compare with that of nonlimited English proficiency students in regular, monolingual English programs.

5. How many limited English proficiency pupils in bilingual educational/ESL programs repeat a grade compared to nonlimited English proficient pupils in the regular, monolingual English program.

6. What are the perceptions of parents and community, those with children in the bilingual education/ESL program and those without children in the bilingual education/ESL program.

7. What are the perceptions of school district personnel, administrators, teachers, counselors, those involved in the program and those not involved, of the bilingual education/ESL program.

8. What are the levels of teacher skills and district resources to meet the objectives of the bilingual education/ESL program.

9. What is the condition of classroom environment in the bilingual education/ESL classroom compared to the classroom environment of regular, monolingual English classrooms.

10. What is the cost effectiveness of the bilingual education/ESL program compared to that of the regular, monolingual English program.

Approaches to Answering Evaluation Questions of Locally Funded Programs

These questions regarding locally funded bilingual education/ESL programs can be answered with a considerable amount of probing and analysis. The suggestions which follow are derived from evaluations of locally funded bilingual education/ESL programs. These programs have contained primarily Hispanic, Puerto Rican, pupils. However, these schools also meet the needs of a wide assortment of limited English proficiency pupils including Southeast Asian, Arabic, Greek, and Russian language groups.

Length of time in bilingual education. The length of time which a pupil spends in a bilingual education/ESL program is crucial to most administrators of bilingual education/ESL programs. Three years for a secondary school pupil and two years for an elementary school child is considered optimum. Of course many children

remain longer than two or three years, others are able to profit from an immediate immersion approach with little apparent ill effects. An effective way to determine the length of time per student in a bilingual education/ESL program is to follow a group of LEP students from entry into the school system for three years. For example, in the 1974-75 school year sixty-six LEP children were retrospectively selected for study. Forty-four were placed in bilingual education programs, twenty-two in ESL support programs, and none in the regular school program. By the end of the 1977-78 school year, six were still in the bilingual education program, none were in the ESL support program, and sixty were in the regular school program. Upon further examination, it was found that the six pupils still in the bilingual education program after three years of instruction were exceptional children in need of special education services.

Drop-out rate. The drop-out rate of LEP pupils is important for school administrators, especially of Hispanic, Puerto Rican, students since on the island of Puerto Rico, the drop-out rate before termination of high school is as high as 85%. For evaluative purposes, it is necessary to compare three groups of students: 1) LEP students in bilingual education or English as a second language programs 2) LEP students in regular, monolingual

English programs, and 3) non-Hispanic students in the regular, monolingual English programs. These figures are obtained over a period of three years. For example, in the 1976-77 school year, out of a total of 198 students who withdrew from school after passing required school age, 2.5% were in bilingual education/ESL programs, 18.7% were Hispanic pupils, graduates of the bilingual education/ESL program, in the monolingual English program, and 78.8% non-Hispanic pupils in monolingual English programs. By the end of the 1978-79 school year the percentages of students who drop-out are 1.9% of students in bilingual education/ESL programs, 16.7% were Hispanic students, graduates of the bilingual education/ESL program in monolingual English programs, and 81.4% are non-Hispanic students in monolingual English programs. Such percentages speak for the holding power of locally funded bilingual education/ESL programs.

Graduation Rate. Most school districts are concerned about the graduation rate of their students since a high graduation rate is a sign of success for the total school program. In the case of LEP, Hispanic, Puerto Rican students it opens the prospects of higher education and chances for successful exit from the barrio and poverty. Once again three groups of students can be charted over a period of three years, Hispanic

students in bilingual education/ESL programs, Hispanic students in regular monolingual English programs, and non-Hispanic students in regular, monolingual English programs. An example is that in the 1978-79 school year, 86% of the twelfth grade Hispanic pupils in bilingual education programs graduated, 83% of Hispanic twelfth grade pupils in monolingual English programs graduated while 93% of non-Hispanic twelfth grade pupils in regular, monolingual English programs graduated.

Pupil Academic Achievement. The evaluation of pupil academic achievement in locally funded bilingual education programs is by far the most elusive task of internal or external evaluators. There are three basic alternatives to follow in comparing pupil achievement, assuming that a school district which did not service its LEP pupils with Either bilingual education or English as a second language instruction would be in noncompliance with the Lau remedies and Civil Rights amendments.

A first method is to obtain base-line data on reading tests, especially tests which have English and Spanish versions such as the Interamerican Series or the Language Assessment Battery. Over a three year period a mean raw score at each grade level of the test can be obtained. Variance from this mean raw score can be

obtained at the end of each academic year when school wide testing generally takes place. This procedure has one valuable advantage. If an assessment objective such as: "50% correct items in English reading on the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test at the fourth grade level," is stated, then the assessment objective can be used as a criterion level to determine which pupils will make the transition into the regular, monolingual English program.

A second method is to compare English reading achievement scores of pupils in bilingual education programs with LEP pupils at the same level who have made the transition out of the bilingual education program. At best, this method confirms the fact that LEP pupils belong in the bilingual education/ESL program and those in the regular monolingual English program have been properly placed.

A third method is to survey teacher grades. For example, a random sample of fifth grade children in bilingual education/ESL programs and a random sample of pupils in the regular, monolingual English program can be compared by tallying the end of the year subject matter grades given by their teachers. The advantage of this procedure is that these grades can be found in the pupil's permanent record file along with standardized test

scores. Most school districts do not administer standardized achievement tests to their LEP pupils. Another problem with this method is that teachers in bilingual education programs might tend to be more protective of their pupils because of the nature of the pupils' adjustment problems to a new linguistic and cultural environment.

The real answer to the evaluation of pupil achievement is a good testing and management or record keeping system for LEP pupils which is compatible with the testing and record keeping system of non-LEP pupils. This testing and record keeping system should be in the offing, particularly with the appearance of micro-computers in the schools.

Conclusions

The evaluation of locally funded bilingual education programs is becoming as important as the evaluation of federally funded programs. The guidelines and procedures for evaluating locally funded bilingual education programs have to be different from those of federally funded programs because of the differing purposes and audiences of the evaluation. The most difficult assessment problem is pupil academic achievement. A testing and record keeping program in the two languages has to be established within the locally funded programs.

Community perceptions of the program and staff performance needed to carry out bilingual education assessment objectives can also be obtained. The cost effectiveness of a bilingaul education/ESL program can be determined through standard auditing procedures. The cost to educate a limited English proficiency pupil need not exceed that of educating a monolingual English pupil.

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